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19 May 1967

OUTLINE OF A PLAN TO END THE WAR IN VIETNAM

I. BASIC JUDGMENTS REGARDING THE SITUATION

1. While recognizing that there will one day be a political solution, the NV-VC will not agree to terms on which we would also settle until or unless they believe that their position in the South has been so weakened as to preclude an eventual victory there by political means.

2. They will not be driven to this conclusion by the bombing or blockade of the North.

3. The USSR will continue to supply war material and economic goods to NV. These will come by land largely unimpeded even if Haiphong is blockaded or damaged. The Soviets are not committed to a Viet Cong victory in the South, but are committed to the protection of North Vietnam and to the frustration of Chinese influence in Hanoi.

4. US military action against North Vietnam which appeared likely to destroy NV military capabilities, dangerously weaken its political control, or result in severe damage would bring China increasingly into the war, thus changing the character and scope of the conflict and precipitating widespread fear of World War III.

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5. The NV-VC would almost certainly negotiate if the bombing of the North were stopped and if we demanded no substantial quid pro quo.

6. The NV-VC would probably follow a negotiate-fight strategy, attempting to improve their military and political position in South Vietnam while negotiations were in progress in the belief that we were more interested in getting out than in obtaining our objectives.

7. In any negotiations, NV-VC would be subjected to contrary pressures from Moscow and Peking. Moscow's object would be to get the affair closed out on the best terms possible, while Peking would seek US humiliation.

8. The US is losing prestige in all parts of the world because of its lack of success in Vietnam. In Europe it is heavily criticized because of the fact and extent of its involvement. Most Asian governments hope the US achieves its objectives, but most Europeans and Asians would be unhappy if the war intensified substantially, and some nations would disavow US policy.

9. The essential key to a satisfactory outcome by military means, negotiation, or other political solution is the continued weakening of the VC structure in the South.

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II. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

1. Stop the bombing, except of supply routes in the border area, and refrain from any intensification of the war in North Vietnam.
2. Send another 200,000 troops to South Vietnam, intended among other things to keep NV forces bottled up in the border area.
3. Accept the NV's "negotiate-fight" tactic.
4. Strengthen our position in the South, by:
 - a. Pushing efforts to destroy the VC political, military, economic, and organizational infrastructure.
 - b. Pushing the revolutionary development program as rapidly as possible.
 - c. Working toward rehabilitation of the ARVN as rapidly as possible.
 - d. Trying to make the political situation in South Vietnam as flexible as possible, preventing too much control by military and northern elements.

III. RATIONALE AND EXPOSITION OF THE PLAN

1. Stopping the bombing. The principal advantages would be:
 - a. Reducing one of the main causes of criticism of US policy, at home and abroad.
 - b. Eliminating a costly and almost valueless military drain.

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c. Reducing the incentive to the USSR to supply the NV-VC forces.

d. Strengthening the Soviet as against Chinese hand in Hanoi.

e. Encouraging Soviet pressure on Hanoi to negotiate and reducing the chances of a freeze in US-Soviet relations.

f. Almost certainly leading to negotiations with NV-VC.

g. Reducing the likelihood of greater Chinese involvement.

h. Making additional resources available for aerial ground support and policing of NV-VC supply routes.

The principal disadvantages would be:

a. The possible interpretation by NV-VC and Peking that the US resolve was weakening.

b. The possible weakening effect upon South Vietnamese morale and US troop morale.

c. Some slight gain for the NV logistical system.

An attempt would be made to reduce these disadvantages by the other actions taken.

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2. US Troop reinforcement. This would have the following advantages:

a. It would tend to negate the interpretation that US resolve was weakening and would tend to counteract losses to troop morale, especially if it facilitated better ground support and aerial policing of supply routes to the South.

b. It would suggest greater US resolve to win the war where it matters, i.e., in the South.

c. It would facilitate the bottling up of NV units in the DMZ area and keep them isolated from the VC.

d. It would permit greater resources to be devoted to the fight against the VC, which will hurt the Communist long-time aims the most.

e. It would permit a larger supply of advisors for training and improving the quality of the ARVN.

3. Accepting a "negotiate-fight" situation.

The North Vietnamese appear to recognize that a political solution will be the ultimate outcome, but believe that their position will be better six months hence than at present for the development of such a solution. Thus, in order to stop the bombing

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and to attempt to improve their position while negotiating, they would be willing to talk without permitting much progress toward settlement to take place. We can, by doing certain things we are capable of doing, prove their estimate wrong and strengthen our position during the negotiating period, thus bringing them to a settlement on terms we can accept. In addition, by accepting the "fight-negotiate" tactic we will reduce very substantially criticism of our policy at home and abroad, and we might even bring considerable international support to our negotiating position. The steps in our strategy would be as follows:

- a. To send 60,000 to 75,000 troops to Vietnam within the next 3-4 weeks.
- b. Then halt the bombing of the North, ascribing this to (1) desire to negotiate, (2) useful damage done, (3) concentration on south and supply lines.
- c. During subsequent 4-6 weeks, while awaiting the NV response on negotiations.
 - (1) add another 75,000-125,000 troops.
 - (2) wage quiet diplomatic campaign with Soviets, Canadians, and others, to assure that negotiations do begin.
 - (3) intimate that still more troops will arrive if negotiations do not begin.

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d. Make **publicly** clear our readiness to negotiate but readiness to fight it out in the South, if necessary.

e. Meanwhile push on with steps below in order to strengthen our capability to do so and to demonstrate to NV-VC that it would be best to agree to terms before their situation became worse.

4. Strengthening our position in the South.

One of the fundamental judgments of the scheme outlined is that it is not necessary to defeat the NV forces, but only to hold them in isolation from the VC military and political structure and prevent them from strengthening it. Thus, a strategy on their part which draws our attention and resources into a military conflict with these forces serves their ends, even if they lose battles. Thus, our problem, while moving into a posture to contain these forces and get negotiations opened, is to move as rapidly as possible toward demonstrating the growing destruction and decay of the VC and the difficulty of reconstructing a viable organism for a later political onslaught against the South Vietnamese regime.

The main focus of our efforts in the South would be the following:

a. An attack on the VC which would concentrate on search and destroy of cadre, leadership, headquarters, and logistical

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supply. The VC forces as such would fade to the degree this was accomplished. This would be accomplished largely by clandestine action, air attack, and paratroop operations.

b. An effort to achieve more clear and hold successes. To a very considerable degree this means a thorough rehabilitation of the Vietnamese army. Success in this effort will provide a better base for holding a strong political position after the US departs. It also means strengthening the civilian effort and commitment of the South Vietnamese regime.

c. Creation of a political structure which will accept and will be willing and able to carry out a political solution. The present leadership may not be capable of doing this. It lacks broad political support, is regarded as dependent upon the US, and is overly committed to the pursuit of military victory. The principal US objectives would be:

1. To acquire political leadership, essentially southern in composition but with some military and northern representation, which would have a broad appeal in South Vietnam and would not be so anathema to the NV-VC as to constitute a bar to a political solution.

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2. To position ARVN and US forces in such a way as to block a coup d'etat against such a leadership.

3. To carry out honestly a program of national reconciliation, including the return and utilization of those few exiles who have popular appeal.

4. To de-politicize the military establishment and insure its loyalty and effectiveness by appropriate command changes, exile, etc.

5. To bring about the establishment and operation of political institutions in such a way as to permit easy adjustment to a political solution, but to assure that certain elements of the power structure, while apparently flexible, are likely to remain intact for at least several years.

Accomplishment of these objectives would be difficult, would have to be undertaken immediately, and would depend upon the skill of the US diplomatic and clandestine services.

IV. DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. There have been some political developments in the US regarding the Vietnam war which are most unfortunate for the strength and future of the nation. One is the increasing polarization

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of opinion; the broad center group supporting the President is being reduced, and there is movement toward the extremes, largely prompted by the wish to get the war over. This is making the administration's choices ever more difficult to make; even the North Vietnamese premier has remarked, "with a trace of sympathy", that the President is "being pulled this way and that" by his advisors.

2. The other is an increasing support in popular opinion, despite warnings from Congressional leaders in both parties, for whatever escalation is necessary to win a military victory. This opinion does not understand that this is not our objective and that it would probably prompt Chinese intervention, more Soviet help and broader difficulties with the USSR, and result in an even longer and intensified struggle.

3. The problem, therefore, is to reduce the polarization and to create support for a political solution. Stopping the bombing, increasing troop strength, and moving toward negotiations all at about the same time would almost certainly reduce the polarization and create a broader consensus.

4. Creating support for a political solution would be more difficult. There would be much concern that the solution would be no good and that all would have been in vain. This problem can be attacked from two angles.

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a. One is the strengthening of our position and the GVN in South Vietnam and the prolonging -- without leading to the termination by the other side -- of negotiations while this strengthening is going on. This will increase the capability of the South Vietnamese and soften the terms of the NV-VC, lest it go so far as render their position hopeless. Quiet explanation to Congress will be necessary to convey what is happening.

b. The other is to get more Americans involved across a broader spectrum of American life, so that there is a greater stake in a successful negotiation and a reduction of casualties. This is one reason why the reinforcement should come from the reserves (the other is that they can be mobilized and dispatched faster).

5. There would be a major political problem if we miscalculated or were pressured by events into terms which led to an early communitization of the South. We ought to start negotiating with the idea of the negotiations lasting 6-12 months, with nothing major being accomplished before six months. Thus, we would have time to assess our strength and that of the South Vietnamese regime as we went along. We ought to aim for a political solution which lasted at a minimum 3-5 years. This would also give us time to

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shore up our position in neighboring countries.

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Meanwhile we should do what we could

to Titoize the North Vietnamese and weaken Chinese influence generally, so as to soften the effect of a collapse in South Vietnam if it came.

6. It is essential that this plan get under way as soon as possible, since the closer the 6-12 month negotiating period approaches the 1968 national elections, the more difficult it will be to elicit the designed responses (in the US, in North Vietnam, and abroad generally).

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